

# Health

## Good posture can help you age better

BY DIANE C. LADE  
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Turns out "stand up straight" isn't just good advice from your mother.

Aging experts increasingly believe posture is, in some cases, an indicator of how well you will age. They suggest seniors in particular, who sometimes begin to stoop or shuffle as they grow older, should be more aware of their body alignment and take action if their posture is out of whack.

"Posture affects everything we do. We want people to build an awareness about their posture ... and teach them to move with greater symmetry and balance," says Steven Weiniger, an Atlanta-area chiropractor and posture expert who works with seniors. He will be lecturing to health-care professionals at the Florida Chiropractic Association's summer convention in Boca Raton on June 13-16.

Most elders are aware of how important exercise is, and more are having balance testing done — both good ways to prevent falls. But Weiniger said posture is an overlooked part of the wellness equation.

Primary care physicians may recognize the health risks that hunched shoulders and "flexed" posture hint at. But often, they refer those patients for physical therapy when it's almost too late, said Kevin Pallone, a physical therapist specializing in geriatrics.

Posture is one of the things he evaluates at his clinics in Boynton Beach and at the Louis and Anne Green Memory and Wellness Center on Florida Atlantic University's Boca Raton campus.

Slouching seniors who come in complaining they have a balance problem often also have a complicated mix of poor posture, weak muscles and bones and limited

### Posture tips

**Take posture pictures:** Wearing gym clothes, relax and stand in what you think is your best posture. Have someone take full-length photos of you from side, front and back. Do this once a year to monitor any changes.

**Be posture conscious:** Check yourself in your posture photos or in a full-length mirror from top to toes. Is your head level and balanced above your shoulders? Are your shoulders level and even over your hips? Are your hips level or is your pelvis tilted forward or backward? Are thighs, knees and feet aligned?

**Keep moving:** Bad posture in part comes from weak muscles. And controlled motion is critical. Exercise daily, even if just a little. Do exercises that improve balance, flexibility and strength.

**Monitor your pain:** Neck and back pain often are caused, in part, by poor posture.

— Diane C. Lade

flexibility, Pallone said. Mix them together and the person could be at risk for respiratory problems and neck and lower back pain that will cause them to become even more glued to the couch.

A recent study, published online in The Journals of Gerontology Series A: Biological Sciences and Medical Sciences, suggests seniors with a specific type of poor posture — high "trunk line of inclination" angles between two specific vertebra — might be more likely to eventually need at-home care or be admitted to a nursing home.

Japanese researchers looked at 804 people age 65 and older who were living in a town near Tokyo, taking four different spinal measurements with a computer-based "spinal mouse." They found, in doing a followup almost five years later, that those with the greatest trunk line inclinations were 3½ times more likely to have lost their ability to feed, bathe or dress themselves.

"We know that movement allows you to maintain a level of activity and the more active you are, the better you age," said Weiniger, who created the StrongPosture program detailed in his book, "Stand Taller — Live Longer" (\$9.99 Kindle edition at amazon.com; \$22.95 softcover).

Stretching techniques and proper exercises can help seniors regain muscle strength, improve posture and gain flexibility, Pallone said. "Can we get them to where they are 18 again? No," he said. "Can we get them feeling better? Yes."

For more information on the StrongPosture program, go to [BodyZone.com](http://BodyZone.com) or [standtallerlivelonger.com](http://standtallerlivelonger.com).

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Steven Weiniger, chiropractor and posture expert, demonstrates one of his StrongPosture exercises on a patient.